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THE FITCH COLLECTION OF WAX PORTRAITS

AN unusual and most welcome addition to the Department of Decorative Arts is a number of portraits and a large group in wax, the gift of Captain and Mrs. W. G. Fitch in memory of their son, Clyde Fitch, briefly referred to in the last number of the BULLETIN. Though of late the art of modeling portraits in wax has received but scant attention, yet history tells us that it is one of the most ancient of all arts. In Egypt a magician of the Old Empire fashioned a crocodile in wax, and by means of *hekau* charms or magic formulæ endowed it with life, and by its means destroyed his enemy. At a more appreciable epoch—that is, during the lifetime of Alexander the Great—Lysistratus, a sculptor, modeled many busts in colored wax. Under the Romans, portraits of departed ancestors and even the sacred household images were similarly fashioned in wax. As to its use between the days of Imperial Rome and the fifteenth century, when next we hear of it, nothing is known, yet early in the latter period the sculptors and jewelers of Italy revived the custom. Michelangelo, Leone Leoni, Benvenuto Cellini and many another artist famous in the annals of the following century, made use of this tractable material both in oval portraits, busts, and groups.

The exquisite colors often seen in these old wax portraits are now due to accident or to chemical changes in the pigments—changes that might naturally be expected after the lapse of several centuries. The artist who modeled them thoroughly understood his material, as he had early discovered the secret of mixing powdered color with oil and adding this to the wax when in a state of fusion. Of the pieces presented by Captain and Mrs. Fitch, a half-length portrait bust of Victor Amadeus III of Sardinia (1773–96) is especially remarkable. Other pieces of much interest are Italian three-quarter-length portraits in oval medallions, a colored papal seal, a fine and large group representing the Rape of Proserpina and a charming French portrait of a lady in a green and white striped *costume d'été* of the late eighteenth century. G. C. P.

A BRONZE MORTAR

IN the hall of the new wing of Decorative Arts there is now on exhibition a large bronze mortar of Italian workmanship, modeled in low relief. The mortar, which has recently been acquired, is shaped like an inverted bell and measures 14 $\frac{5}{8}$ inches in height, and in diameter, 11 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches at the base and 19 inches at the rim. Encircling the mortar, just below the rim, is the inscription ANNO MDXLIV MANNVS CROCVLVS AMERINUS FIERI FECIT ✠. Translated the inscription reads: In the year 1544 Mannus Croculus Amerinus (a Latinized Italian name) caused this to be made.

The decoration, apart from an acanthus-leaf molding, consists of four oval cartouches inclosing figure reliefs, separated from each other by balanced arrangements, also in relief, of foliage, grotesque figures and putti. The subjects are taken from the Trojan Cycle, or more particularly, from the history of Paris.

In the first of these scenes there is represented a banquet in the clouds. Zeus, seated on an eagle's back, is at one end of a table around which other deities, including Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite, are grouped. At the left a winged female figure approaches, holding in one hand what appears to be an apple and in the other a snake. Behind her the signs of the Zodiac are seen arching through the clouds like a rainbow. This scene probably represents Eris, the Goddess of Discord, appearing uninvited among the gods at the marriage feast of Peleus and Thetis.

Curiously enough the relief next in order does not follow the first directly, but is placed on the opposite side of the mortar. The subject of this relief is the Judgment of Paris. The young shepherd is seated at the left in a wooded landscape; before him stands Hermes, who introduces to him the three jealous goddesses. Hera and Athena are standing, Aphrodite is seated at the right with Eros at her side.

The Rape of Helen is the subject of the third relief. At the left is a ship with sails spread, ready for flight. Toward this Paris is hastening, carrying the beautiful

wife of Menelaus in his arms. Behind him a battle is raging.

The fourth relief pictures the Sack of Troy. In the foreground is an altar at which kneels Cassandra (?) threatened by Ajax (?). At the right, against a background of flames the wooden Horse rises above the fighting crowds.

These sculptures in low relief have been attributed to Jacopo Tatti called Sansovino (1486-1570), one of the most famous masters of the Italian Renaissance. Sansovino spent his early years in Florence, his native city, and in Rome, but during the latter half of his long life he lived in Venice, beautifying this city with high achievements in the arts of architecture and sculpture. In Sansovino's sculpture, observation of nature is combined with enthusiasm for the antique. He solved with

consummate skill the special problem of early sixteenth-century sculpture, namely, the expression of the living quality of forms imitated from the individual in the terms of classic proportions.

The attribution of the reliefs on the bronze mortar to Sansovino, is, unfortunately, open to question. Although the reliefs are admirable in design, in the expression of movement, and in the feeling for beauty of form and pose, with a decorative effect that is incidentally enhanced by the brilliant play of light on the rough cast surfaces, nevertheless, there is lacking the convincing impress of the master's genius. If not by Sansovino himself, the mortar is certainly a superior work of his atelier, reflecting in more than a faint image the charm, the sensuous richness of the master's art.

J. B.



BRONZE MORTAR
SCHOOL OF SANSOVINO